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Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

SELLING LIKE HOT CAKES – When Delta Sigma Theta, a college sorority, held its annual meeting recently, United Church Press was there with a tempting offer. One of its authors, Vashti McKenzie, was the keynote speaker, and United Church Press thoughtfully brought along her latest book, which it had just published: *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Develop for African American Women in ministry*. The result? Nearly 1,900 copies were sold in four days, necessitating a reprint. Talk about point of sale!

TAKING THE HEAT – During its summer convocation, United Black Christians moved from Miami's air-conditioned Intercontinental Hotel into the sweltering noonday heat outdoors in a demonstration to protest Federal efforts to cut back on affirmative actions programs. The delegates marched 10 blocks to the Claude Pepper Federal Building to raise their voices and signs in protest. United Black Christians is a recognized group within the UCC.

– UCN, 9/96

TAKING MONEY FROM UNCLE SAM – Most UCC churches probably believe in the separation of church and state, but there are times when government money helps local churches run such social services as soup kitchens, battered women shelters, homeless centers, day care facilities and after school classes, to name a few. How then can you preserve your religious liberty and non-establishment of religion by the state yet take its money? Some suggestions from the Rev. Oliver "Buzz" Thomas, a church-state specialist.

- Establish a separate means of accounting from the ecclesiastical body with which one is affiliated.
- Observe non-discrimination in provision of services. This reflects both Christian and constitutional values.
- No government funding should be directed toward worship or other religious activities.
- Practice non-discrimination in employment of persons who will provide funded services. Not to do so would subsidize discrimination by tax-paying citizens.
- Government money may not fund capital expenditures for mixed-use facilities, those used for religious events as well as social service programs.

—Our thanks to *Diakonie*, the newsletter of the UCC Council for Health and Human Services Ministries

TAKING ACTION ON GAMBLING – Sandusky, Ohio, is a pleasant lakefront community known for its amusement park, Cedar Point. But when folks at First UCC discovered that Cedar Fair, the company owning the amusement park, wanted to petition the community for a casino permit, they swung into action. Pastor Robert Quillen organized all the churches in town to work together to educate their members and the public at large about the issue of gambling. Education meetings were held. Gamblers Anonymous was called in to give testimony. Ads were placed in the local papers, churches held seminars. They met with company officials and even picketed its offices, all in an effort to publicize the impact of gambling on a small community.

For now, says Quillen, the company has "backed out" of operating a casino, but he is sure the issue will come up again. Local gambling petitions are springing up around the country like mushrooms after a spring rain, and First Church has prepared a successful strategy for resisting such proposals in the future. For more information, write to Quillen at First UCC, 225 E. Jefferson at Hancock, Sandusky, OH 44870. Members of UCChristNet, part of the Ecunet religious computer network, can learn more about anti-gambling measures by joining the meeting "Ohio Casino Issues."

OH NO! – When Fred died and went to heaven, St. Peter stopped him at the pearly gates. “You’ll need 200 points worth of righteous living to enter,” said St. Pete.

“Well,” replied Fred, “I’ve been a member of my church for 47 years, a deacon, trustee and Sunday school teacher.”

“That’s good for one point,” said St. Pete.

Dismayed, the man thought some more. “I’ve been a good husband for all the years of my married life and I never cheated on my wife,” he said. “My children love me, I tithed, worked in the soup kitchen, been president of three service clubs.”

“You get another point,” said St. Pete. The man strained to come up with more goodness but couldn’t.

Frustrated, he threw up his hands in anguish. “Gosh, if I get in there, it will be by the grace of God,” he sighed.

“That’s worth 198 points,” said St. Peter. “Come on in.”

FIRST TELECONFERENCE A SUCCESS – The UCC made history Sept. 14 when it held its first-ever nationwide teleconference, “Freedom of Conscience and the Radical Religious Right.” The teleconference featured a panel of representatives from various religious perspectives including Ray Suarez from National Public Radio, the Rev. Timothy Crater of the National Association of Evangelicals, the Rev. John Beckman of Bread for the World, and U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-California.

Members of Peoples Congregational UCC in Washington, D.C., volunteered their church as the national uplink site, with hundreds of members of the church participating from more than 70 downlink sites across the country.

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THE LORD MEE IS BLESSED – Some folks wonder why *The New Century Hymnal* and other publications find it necessary to change the words of familiar songs and scripture readings. One answer, of course, is that language changes to reflect the times. Here’s the way Psalm 23 turned out when two ministers published the most up-to-date version in the *Bay Psalm Book* (“The Whole Booke of Psalms Faithfully Translated into Englishe Metre, 1640”), the first book published in English on the North American continent:

“The Lord to me a shepheard is: want therefore shall not I.
Hee in the foulds of tender grass doth make me down to ly.
Hee leads me to the waters still. Restore my soul doth Hee;
In paths of righteousness, he will for his name sake lead mee.
In vally of death shade although I walk I’le fear non ill
For thou with me thy rod, also thy staff me comfort will.
Thou hast fore me a table spread, in presence of my foes:
Thou dost anoint with oyle my head, my cup over-flowes.
Goodness and mercy are my dayes all shall follow mee
And in the Lord’s house dwell I shall so long as dayes shall bee.”

— *Our thanks to the Rev. Donald E. Overlock, Conference Minister, Penn Northeast Conference*

SINGING THE RAISED DOTS – In what is believed to be a first for any UCC publication, *The New Century Hymnal* is coming out in a braille edition. The entire book will be contained in 16 ring-bound multiple binders and will contain the words only – no music. One set will be at church offices in Cleveland. For more information, please contact Pat Stroudt, The National Braille Association (New Century Hymnal project), 3 Townline Circle, Rochester, NY 14623, (716) 427-8260.

MISPLACED PRIORITIES? – On July 10, the U.S. Senate voted to give the Pentagon \$266 billion for calendar year 1997. That’s \$11.2 billion more than the military asked for. The very next day, according to *Courage in the Struggle*, the publication of the UCC’s Office for Church in Society, the House of Representatives voted to cut \$7 billion from education, training and children’s programs.

KEYBOARD DEMOCRACY – The former head of NBC News and PBS says the electronic age is making democracy more direct and less representative. And that’s dangerous, warns Larry Grossman, speaking to broadcasters at the annual Everett Parker lecture on ethics in telecommunications, sponsored by the UCC’s Office of Communication. “Instead of Big Brother watching every citizen, in the telecommunications era, every citizen can now keep the nation’s political leaders under constant electronic surveillance.”

Instantaneous “keypad balloting” is on its way. Imagine this recorded message, says Grossman. “Press 1 to vote for candidate A. Press 2 to vote for candidate B. Press 3 if you think we should go to war. Press 4 if you think we should stay out. Press 5 if you want more information. Press 6 if you want to suggest more targets to bomb.” He says that in an “electronic republic” the constitutional protection of checks and balances will be eroded and “a runaway majority can trample on the rights of an unpopular minority.”